

H. Networks or Collaboratives

In contrast to a partnership model, an AFI Project Network or collaborative is an arrangement where multiple diverse organizations share the critical responsibilities – and workload – of operating an AFI Project in an effort to offer a large number of accounts, to maximize cost-efficiency, and to capitalize on organizations’ different expertise. Network arrangements enable the participating organizations to develop and use a common basic infrastructure such as recruitment and training tools, reporting procedures, IDA account monitoring processes, procedures for tracking performance goals and targets, training curricula, and so forth. Often networks allocate responsibility for key activities such as fundraising, program management, financial education, and evaluation to one or two organizations, to enable the others to focus more fully on providing direct services to project participants.

Tip: See the “IDA Collaboratives Toolkit”. Developed by Assets for All Alliance, an AFI grantee, it includes techniques for developing IDA Networks. See the Center for Venture Philanthropy Web site at http://www.pcf.org/venture_philanthropy/afaa.html

AFI Project Networks require more time to establish than do programs designed and delivered by one agency or a group of partnering organizations. Do not underestimate the time it takes to build firm relationships and identify the right partners. As with partnerships, once organizations agree to work together, they should write formal agreements to delineate roles and responsibilities among agencies.

Table 3.4 suggests some typical roles and activities for various organizations in a network project. It also offers some benefits to this model.

Table 3.4. How AFI Project Networks Operate

Network Role	Key Responsibilities	Benefits
Network administrator	Fundraising Data management (MIS) Program standards Quality management Account management Overall coordination of structure	Centralized account and data management reduces cost of reproducing this at each site and also keeps responsibility in hands of organization with expertise.
AFI Project sponsor (there usually are many of these in the network)	Fundraising Data collection Case management Marketing and recruitment Enrollment and account opening Financial and asset-specific training Other support services	Program sponsor organizations can better address fulfilling their mission—delivering services to a community to create an impact—instead of dedicating many resources to program administration.
Financial institutions ^a	Provides accounts Collects account data	Financial institutions provide their expertise in financial products and can still offer additional services.
Other partners (often organizations in the community)	Provide referrals for candidates Marketing and outreach support Financial or asset-specific training Other support services	These organizations offer a service they routinely provide to IDA participants as part of the program. These organizations are partners to the project rather than full network members.
^a Sometimes the institution works directly and exclusively with the AFI Project Network administrator and sometimes with each program sponsor directly.		

For more information on innovations, challenges, and pitfalls in network design, refer to the “Building IDA Networks” section of Appendix A. Get started on the recommended planning process right away.

TIP: OCS is interested in supporting more AFI Projects that feature network structures. A network should submit an AFI application under a lead agency (usually the network administrator or the organization responsible for account management) and provide information about each network member throughout the application. It is a good idea to include signed memoranda of agreement for each network member you list in the application.